

DUŠAN SPASOJEVIĆ

DYING OUT

A Play in Thirteen Pictures

Translated by Svetozar Poštić



DUŠAN SPASOJEVIĆ

Born in 1980 in Valjevo. Graduated dramaturgy in 2005 at the Academy of Arts “Braća Karić,” Belgrade, with the play *A Bullet for All*. He wrote the plays *Dying Out* and *Menagerie* in his second and third years of studies. The play *Menagerie* was read in public as part of the *Project 5* of the Serbian National Theatre (2004), and fragments of the play *Dying Out* were read at the Festival “Northern Exposure” in West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds. *Dying Out* was first shown in Atelier 212, Belgrade, directed by Egon Savin (2006), and the same piece was set by the Montenegrin National Theatre Podgorica. *Menagerie* was performed in Serbian National Theatre Novi Sad (2007), directed by Boris Liješević, and *A Bullet for All* in Croatian Cultural Home, Rijeka (2010), directed by Nemanja Ranković.

The play *Dying Out* received the prize for best text at the Festival “Joakimfest” in Kragujevac, Sterija Prize of the Round Table of Criticism for the best play at the 52nd Sterijino Pozorje, award of the audience for the best play at the festival in Rijeka, award “Ardalion” for best play at the festival in Užice, and it was performed at the Biennale of new drama in Wiesbaden, at theatre festivals in Plzen (Czech Republic) and Olsztyn (Poland). Spasojević wrote a screenplay about the theme of dying out as well. At the moment he is working on a piece with a love theme. The protagonists are Bogoboj Rucović, actor of the National Theatre in the early 20th century and his life partner, Olga Ilić, actress.

LANDSCAPE AFTER ALL THE BATTLES

Dušan Spasojević does not prevaricate, he goes to the gist of things already with the title: *Dying Out*. Dying out summarises the beginning and the end of the play, but a metaphor of suffering and falling is also contained in that word. People on Mount Povlen are dying out, and they live like savages in the mountains near Drina, full of fogs so one cannot see far even from the top of the highest rock.

Toponyms are important, but they are widened into a general metaphor of the village Serbian dramatic literature has already started to forget. With Spasojević there is nothing of the pastoral reflected in the mirror of a gingerbread heart, neither in nature nor in people. The soil is really hard, and the sky is high.

“The wind could have blown our way. But it turned away,” Strahinja says in *Dying Out*. Strahinja’s son, having fallen into a gambling debt, hanged himself, his wife Jovanka became mute because of it, and his daughter Stamenka drowned into drugs and alcohol. The wind has also “turned away” from the house of Strahinja’s neighbour, Milutin, who, before he burned out from brandy, managed to make his son Janko a cripple and his wife Milica miserable...

Life is anxious, troublesome, fearful. Death is a real shadow hanging over lives, just as the shadow of the dead hangs over the living. As much as they harrow others, Spasojević peasants live in anguish them-

selves. The circle is closed, it seems. The flickers of hope are too rare and short to change something. Someone else’s and one’s own mistakes are paid for, and unpaid debts are atoned. Happiness does not live here, the writer warns while placing bright, realistic images into a play of dying out in a menagerie. Everything is stripped reality and everything is, at the same time, reality transformed into a metaphor. Neither heroes nor antiheroes, Spasojević’s characters are all futureless people, losers. They don’t have tragic grandeurs, but they all bare a basic tragic feeling. They are incapable of resisting it, they find a solution in death or in giving up on life. Suicidal and homicidal urges are a sort doom. The path inevitably leads to greyness, to darkness. The writer is not in this case the person who can offer to his heroes the straw of salvation. Or, better even: He would offer it, if he had it. It would be too simple to explain this to Spasojević’s age. (...)

The hearths are extinguished, the pens are empty, the game is killed, the forests are razed, the soil is barren, the men are barren – that’s the landscape after all the battles in Spasojević’s plays.

Feliks Pašić

(Fragments from the forward to the book

Two Plays by D. Spasojević)

Translated by Svetozar Poštić

Characters:

MILICA – peasant woman, 50 years old

JANKO – her son, 19

STRAHINJA – peasant, 50

JOVANKA – peasant woman, his wife, 45

STAMENA – their daughter, 21. Skinny, pale, sickly, hair dyed in bright red.

Povlen¹. Village Gornji Taor.

Hot August. Year 2000.

¹ A mountain near Valjevo

Picture 1

Morning, Milica is peeling potato. Strahinja walks in. He is holding a bowl full of blackberries. He is excited.

MILICA: I haven't seen you in three days. I am worried about you.

STRAHINJA: It hasn't been three years.

MILICA: Sit.

STRAHINJA: No one picks blackberries anymore. For you.

MILICA: Don't walk in this heat. You'll get a stroke.

Milica takes the bowl.

STRAHINJA: I picked it on the way. Near the road, it's all black from blackberries. It's a shame for the sun to kill them.

MILICA: Everything is lost, so are the blackberries.

STRAHINJA: Where is he?

MILICA: Sleeping.

STRAHINJA: Why now? I haven't seen him in two years.

MILICA: He didn't fall asleep till the morning. I heard him walking at night. He didn't close his eyes.

STRAHINJA: I didn't either. Stuffiness won't let you sleep.

MILICA: It's something else, Strahinja. I sense something.

STRAHINJA: Stuffiness grabs you by the throat. Don't imagine things. You haven't seen him in two years. A fruit tree changes, not a man. Up with your chin. Your son is back, and look at you.

MILICA: He wouldn't look at the new house last night.

STRAHINJA: He is not crazy. To strain his eyes. Day is for watching, and night for sleeping.

MILICA: You are right. Still... I sense something.

STRAHINJA: Don't sense, but pour me one. To drink up for your Janko.

Milica brings a bottle of brandy and a shot glass. She pours it to Strahinja.

STRAHINJA: Won't you have some?

MILICA: Even the smell makes me sick.

STRAHINJA: Today is the big day.

MILICA: You know how much my Milutin drank.

STRAHINJA: I will drink for both.

He drinks up the brandy. Pours another one. Drinks it up.

MILICA: How is Jovanka?

STRAHINJA: Still silent. That's all she knows.

MILICA: The years have passed, and she won't budge?

STRAHINJA: She will budge. She will. You'll see. She'll budge.

MILICA: I am going to slaughter a chicken.

HE WALKS OUT.

STRAHINJA (*To himself*): Why sleep now?!

Janko walks in. He is bleary eyed. Strahinja sees him. Janko is happy to see him.

STRAHINJA: Janko!

JANKO: Hello.

Strahinja (*Euphorically*): Don't you hello me. Don't you hello me.

They embrace. Kiss three times. Strahinja is more content now.

STRAHINJA: A man. A man you've become, no doubt. I can hardly recognise you. Sit. Sit.

They sit at the table. Look at one another. In silence.

STRAHINJA: Tell me.

JANKO: What should I tell?

STRAHINJA: Tell me how it is down there?

JANKO: Like everywhere. Everyone is running after dough, and the dough is small.

STRAHINJA: That's what it's always been like. But at night. What is it like at night? Do people go out, or is it a desert like here?

JANKO: I sleep at night. I don't waste money.

STRAHINJA: Why the hell do you run down there,

then? Up there under Povlen, in Veselinovići, a hearth is put out. Both sons have left. There is no one to cultivate the land. No one to look after the cattle. The old people can't do it. They can't, son.

JANKO: Everyone wants something better.

STRAHINJA: Listen, Janko. (*Reproachfully*) Help your mother. She is by herself. (*He is happy again.*) It's good that you came back to her. There is no greater joy for her. She only talked about you. We fixed up the old house for you. As good as new. As if built yesterday. (*Reproachfully*) You should see it! Your mom has made you a nest, made it better than a sparrow. There isn't a nicer one on the mountain!

Milica walks in. She is carrying a plucked chicken.

MILICA: He's up. Come here for a kiss.

Milica is scalding the chicken. Strahinja gets up.

MILICA: Where are you headed?

STRAHINJA: I have to.

MILICA: Stay for lunch.

STRAHINJA: You haven't seen one another in two years.

MILICA: Stay when I tell you.

STRAHINJA: I have to go to the city. My daughter is in the hospital.

JANKO: Stamena?

MILICA (*Worried*): What is it?

STRAHINJA: I don't know till I don't see it. Youth – that's what it is. (*Remembers.*) I almost forgot.

He takes out a bottle of home made brandy from his bag. He gives it to Janko.

STRAHINJA: I was keeping it for my son's wedding. Didn't work out. Twenty years old. Take it.

Janko is confused.

JANKO: I can't. I...

STRAHINJA: And to whom should I give it if not to you? You were Ilija's best friend.

Janko takes the bottle.

JANKO: Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Strahinja starts walking out.

STRAHINJA: Nasty humidity. What is this, people? Everything is burned. As if the sun has got closer. The forest is drying too. You'll hear beech trees cracking at night.

Walks out.

JANKO: Cheers! (*Pause*) Gone.

Milica comes up to the window. She watches him leave with Strahinja.

MILICA: He's gone gray from sorrow, poor wretch. Since Ilija hanged himself, Jovanka hasn't spoken a word. She's gone mute. She found him hanging. Stamena hasn't had much luck either. That's what they say. He closed the pub. They live like paupers. Of the little cattle they have. Of milk and bread.

She turns to Janko. He is looking at the bottle of brandy.

JANKO: You are telling me as if I didn't know.

MILICA: Yes, yes, God, what's up with me?

JANKO: Why can't I hear the oxen. I am used to hearing them moo.

MILICA: I sold the oxen.

JANKO: You sold the strongest oxen in the village?

MILICA: For that money Strahinja and I bought the oak. We had to coat the old house. We bought the tile too. The old one was bad. It was leaking. We did it all by ourselves. He even put the varnish and repaired the old furniture. We changed the taps. Pipes too. All for you. (*Pause*) And you haven't even gone to take a peak.

She walks to the cupboard. Takes out a bunch of letters tied with rope. She is looking through letters. Janko is silent.

MILICA (*Joyfully*): I know everyone by heart. Tell me, what is she like? Is she pretty?

Janko nods.

MILICA: You promised your mother you would bring her. I wasn't expecting you alone. Give me at least her picture to see.

JANKO: It's in the wallet. I forgot the wallet.

He goes to drink some water. Walks over to the window. Milica approaches him. She tickles him.

MILICA: You are embarrassed.

JANKO: I don't have a picture with me.

MILICA: I'll give it back. I want eat it. Come on, show it to me out of your hand.

JANKO: Leave me! I don't have it!

MILICA: You are embarrassed, you ass...

Janko pushes her away. Milica stumbles. She barely stays on her feet. She sits on a chair. Her son walks to her.

JANKO: Excuse me, mother.

MILICA: Excuse me, son.

JANKO: Excuse me, mother. My hand betrayed me. *(He spits on his hand.)*

MILICA: You have a model in that.

JANKO: You know... You know I am not like „him“. You know that well.

MILICA: Why didn't you bring her over? You wrote about her so much. You only wrote about her. Am I leprous?

Janko smiles.

JANKO: You are not leprous.

MILICA: Does she not want to come? She doesn't want to live here on the mountain? Tell your mother. Tell me frankly.

JANKO: I didn't come to stay.

There is a dead silence in the room.

MILICA: That's why you didn't unpack. And I thought you forgot.

JANKO *(Resolutely)*: I am leaving. I only came to tell you that.

MILICA: You didn't have to come.

JANKO: You don't understand. I am leaving the country. I am going to another country. Under a different sky and a different sun. And that sun will warm me differently. And the letters are different.

Milica, stumbling, quickly walks out. Janko follows her.

JANKO: Mooother!!!

The end of Picture 1

Picture 2

Strahinja's house. Jovanka is standing and pouring milk from a large bucket through a funnel into a bottle. She takes bread out of the oven. Wraps it into a cloth. She does everything carefully, with complete dedication. She picks apples from a basket. Separates the nicest. Puts them on the table.

Strahinja enters. He is carrying a strip of bacon. He fills the room with a crackling laughter.

STRAHINJA: Ha, ha, ha. Pack this too. She might use it.

Jovanka packs everything into a bag. She is finished. She goes and sits on a chair. She is rocking. Takes a clew of black wool. She knits.

Strahinja takes clean things out of a dresser. A white shirt and trousers. He brings a washbowl.

„He is washing himself“.

STRAHINJA: Milica said hi to you. She is asking about you. Her Janko came back. A colt left, a stud came back. You wouldn't recognise him. He is getting married. *(Long pause)* He and Stamenka were unseparable as kids. Do you remember? I was hopeful. He is from a good house. We could have got lucky. The wind could have blown our way. But it turned away.

He finishes getting dressed. Looks in the mirror. Takes out a comb. Combs his hair.

STRAHINJA: I deserve to look like a man myself. A white shirt was like a uniform to me. What a household master I was. Do you remember? When did you see my boots muddy? When? Never.

Puts a watch on his wrist. Approaches the table. Packs everything into a bag. Puts Milica's packet at the end. He turns to Jovanka.

STRAHINJA: Do you want me to tell something to your daughter? (Pause) You don't want to or you don't know? (Angrily) How long are you going to knit the same sweater? Don't you get tired of it? You don't, I know.

He walks to the door. Stops.

STRAHINJA: Take care till tomorrow. I'll be back soon. (Reproachfully) And don't feed the cattle anymore. I've fed them. I've told you a hundred times: the cattle can eat even when full. It doesn't know it's full. Don't shove the hay under their snouts. They'll die in this heat.

He walks out. Jovanka stays by herself. Knits. The rocking chair is screeching. There is dead silence in the room. It becomes cold. She unsews ten rows of wool. The sweater becomes smaller by a third. She continues knitting.

The end of Picture 2

Picture 3

Milica's house. Janko at the table. Not eating dinner. Milica walking.

MILICA: So she talked you into it.

JANKO: Her name is Marija.

MILICA: I don't care for her name is. I don't want to know. This wasn't your idea. Your mother knows you. That's a city lady. I know them. All she wants is to see the world. They are afraid of work. Her hands are not

made to hold a hoe. I am a fool for thinking about making it easier for her. I'll go to the field, I told myself, so her skin wouldn't crack in the wind. So the dew wouldn't moisten her feet. And this is what I get, damn her.

JANKO: It's not true. Don't talk like that.

Milica gets angry. She takes Janko's letters. She tears them up.

MILICA: I don't want to hear a word about her. Not a single word.

Janko tries to calm her and reason with her.

JANKO: Calm down, mother.

MILICA: Don't calm me down.

JANKO: Don't blame her. If someone is guilty, it's me. If I am guilty at all. I want to leave. Me, Janko. Occupation: blacksmith. And Janko the blacksmith wants to forge his luck elsewhere.

MILICA: There's no luck for you here.

JANKO: There isn't.

Milica suddenly changes her mood. She wants to cry. She doesn't. Janko feels sorry. He wants to mitigate what he said.

JANKO: There isn't, but there will be. There will be when I come back as a gentleman. With my pockets full. Here, for example, my friend, we were apprentices together. He left for Germany. To the same city. With the same agency. Two years ago. They say he earned a new car. He will come back next year. He left on foot, and he is coming back on wheels. New ones. That's what'll happen to me.

MILICA: I won't live that long.

JANKO: You don't die until your time is up.

MILICA: I've reached fifty. I won't go farther than that. *They are silent for a while. Thinking.*

MILICA: Eat some, it's already cold.

JANKO: I'm not hungry.

MILICA: You should know that pigeons will come

under your roof. They will shit everywhere. Everywhere. We worked so hard in vain.

JANKO: Mother, when I come, I will build one for me, one for you, and one for Strahinja. There you go.

MILICA: And the empty land? For whom?

JANKO: Barren. All in hills. Steep. Damp. Half of the crop rots. The wind. Mountain. You know it better than I do.

MILICA: The two of you and I, that's three. Six hands. We would build the farm in the spring. It would be like it used to. Even better.

JANKO: I told you my last word.

MILICA: You are lazy. Not like your father. If you were half of what he was, it would be different.

JANKO: I like what I am.

MILICA: You shudder right away.

JANKO: I do. My hair raises on my head.

MILICA: Milutin was honest. And hard working. The most honest and hard working.

JANKO: I am not denying that.

MILICA: And he would have never left me. Never. *(Pause, reproachfully.)* You didn't even go to light a candle for him.

JANKO: I want to go... But there is something that won't let me.

MILICA: A martyr in life. A martyr in death.

JANKO: We paid for that martyrdom. He was hard working. It would have been better if he weren't. He worked like a dog. Till death. I remember better than you do. But I also remember how he would go to Strahinja's pub. And then chug one, chug another. Till his brain burns.

MILICA: I couldn't do anything about that.

JANKO: I couldn't either.

MILICA: I couldn't stand up against the one who was feeding us.

JANKO: He would beat us.

MILICA: Only while drunk. Brandy eats up the brain too.

JANKO: He would beat until our skin would break. Me and you.

MILICA: He was feeding us. He was feeding my father and mother too. The paupers would starve to death. I had to endure.

Milica starts crying. Janko strokes her hair.

MILICA: If you would know how long my day is. And night. I count to a hundred. To thousand. Sleep never comes.

Milica calms down. They are quiet for a long time. Janko realises they are embraced. Milica also. They both startle, suddenly aware of it. Milica gets up.

MILICA: A man's got to do what a man's got to do. Go to that Germany. God, make it burn.

JANKO: That's the way I like you, mother dear. I knew you would understand.

MILICA: Only... Sell the house, son. Sell the stable. The orchard. There's no cattle. Sell me. Just don't sell the land where your father is buried.

JANKO: The house is old. Decrepit. *(Joking.)* I am not selling you. It's steep everywhere. Who wants it? It's flat only by the road. That's where his grave is. Only that plot can be sold. It seems he got buried there on purpose.

MILICA: He didn't want the steep part either.

JANKO: I already have a buyer for that plot. And if I don't pay to the agency for the papers, passports and visas, my plan will be ruined.

They are silent.

MILICA: I can't watch this. I will poison myself. You didn't come to his funeral. I lied. *Made up excuses. It is over now. I was so ashamed, I couldn't look anyone in the eyes. I can't lie about this.*

JANKO: Don't lie. I'll tell them. All of them. Let them judge me.

MILICA: Why did you start hating me? You started hating all of this. Look at the mother. *(Pause)*. Come on, eat. Eat. You are not eating anything.

JANKO: I can't eat anymore, mother. My stomach is not used to it anymore. It can't digest this food. *(He walks out.)*

The end of Picture 3

Picture 4

Milica's house. Milica is sitting at the table. She is looking in front of her self, motionless. Strahinja enters. He is dressed the same as in the last scene. Formally. He is looking at her. She turns around. They look at one another. They are quiet.

STRAHINJA: What is it? Tell me. *(She is quiet.)* Tell me, why suffer. Your eyes, are watery, Milica. Speak up!

MILICA: My son is leaving.

STRAHINJA: So soon. He hasn't even taken a breath, and he's going back.

MILICA: He is leaving. Do you hear me? He is leaving to look for happiness. To Germany. To the North. He is going to Europe.

STRAHINJA: Isn't Europe coming to us? That's what they say.

MILICA: I sensed it all. All of it.

STRAHINJA: I saw him up near the road. He and that land surveyor, drunk like skunks. They don't see one another. What is he doing with that drunkard? As soon as I saw him, I knew there's trouble.

MILICA: They are measuring the land.

STRAHINJA: What are they measuring?

MILICA: He is selling the land. He has to pay for the trip. He can't go like a blind man.

STRAHINJA: Of all the land, he wants to sell that piece. You are kidding me.

MILICA: It's only flat by the road. The rest is steep and barren.

STRAHINJA: Milutin is buried there! Hey! That's where his grave is. What are you saying? What will the people say?

MILICA: That I am crazy. Which I am.

STRAHINJA: He promised he would get married.

MILICA: They are leaving not married.

STRAHINJA: The peasant's head is hollow. He can't think of that.

MILICA: It seems that mine is even hollower.

STRAHINJA: Women have ruined them. Him and my son. They look at them like the cattle does. A peasant is not for a city girl. She spoils him.

MILICA: Everything has been spoiled for a long time. A long time.

STRAHINJA: We should have beaten them a long time ago. But you let them go. We have spoiled the children. Now it's all coming back to us.

They are quiet.

Strahinja takes everything he prepared to take to his daughter from the bag. He takes out Milica's packet too. Puts it on the table. Milica is watching.

MILICA: You didn't even go down there?

STRAHINJA: It would have been better if I hadn't. *(Pause.)* I came straight to you. I haven't been at home. I can't upset my wife.

MILICA: I prepared all of that for your Stamena.

STRAHINJA: She threw it away, Milica. I was picking it up from the floor. She threw me out like a dog. I was so ashamed.

MILICA: Don't tell a word to Jovanka.

STRAHINJA: Never.

MILICA: What is it? What does she say?

STRAHINJA: She is threatening. Hissing like a snake. She will put out my eyes, she says.

MILICA: So, what is it?

STRAHINJA: Brandy. Burned. She is shaking like a twig.

MILICA: What do the doctors say?

STRAHINJA: She has to come here. She has to stay at home.

MILICA: She agreed?

STRAHINJA: They threatened her with a strait jacket. She had to.

MILICA: That's good.

STRAHINJA: They will come see her every first day of the month. And she has to take medicine. Some latest type. It's expensive as hell.

MILICA: Whatever it costs.

STRAHINJA: I don't have anything.

Silence.

MILICA: I don't either.

STRAHINJA: I'll open up the pub. I've decided.

MILICA: You have to. There's no other way out.

Strahinja: My house is still draped in black, and now we will drink and celebrate. But I have to. *(Pause.)* There, I let my go. I didn't tie them up. The son went to school. He quit. He got into bad company. The devil came to get his due. She wanted to go to the city also. To be a hairdresser. She was good. That's what they say. And the devil came to get his due again. One is six feet under and the other white as a sheet. Fuck their school. There's no better school than hoe.

Milica comes up and hugs him.

MILICA: Don't be afraid. Everything will be alright.

Strahinja wiggles out of the hug.

MILICA: Stay. I am afraid.

STRAHINJA: My wife is waiting for me. I'll come back.

MILICA: Come. As soon as possible. Straighten your back. You're not an old man.

He walks out without saying goodbye. Janko enters drunk. He fills an empty demijohn with water.

JANKO: Did Strahinja walk by, or am I imagining things?

MILICA: He walked by.

JANKO: Didn't even say hi?

MILICA: Didn't even say hi.

JANKO: You are all angry.

MILICA: He and Milutin were best friends. He is not happy.

JANKO: And I am happy. I have to!

MILICA: So you got drunk. It reeks of brandy.

JANKO: I didn't get drunk out of happiness, mother. *Closes the demijohn. Walks out. Milica stands at the door and yells after him.*

MILICA: I don't know where to hide from the shame! And you are just drinking! Just drink! *(She slams the door.)* And I will poison myself.

The end of Picture 4

Picture 5

Strahinja's house. Jovanka sits on a rocking chair knitting. Strahinja enters. "He is obviously in a good mood."

STRAHINJA: I am coming with good news. Our daughter is coming back in a few days.

Jovanka is still knitting. From time to time she looks at him.

STRAHINJA: I know you are glad. Your eyes are smiling. Your eyes are betraying you.

He is changing. Puts on his old garb.

STRAHINJA: Back to the rags, Strahinja. You are not a gentleman anymore. And I am most comfortable in these rags. The doctors recommended home care. She has to rest well. She was tired from the strenuous life. *(Pause.)* She asked about your right away. „What is my mother doing?“ With those words. I said, your

mother is singing. Killing us all day. I'm gone deaf. The neighbours are complaining too. I had to joke a little.

She pretends not to listen to him. He continues lying.

STRAHINJA: She is at least twice as beautiful as she was. And she is laughing. Laughing all the time, and her teeth are white as a snow.

He is putting things back into the dresser.

STRAHINJA: Pull up those curtains. Let the day shine in. So the sun would see us. Our child is coming. I don't want her to find darkness here. (*He is walking towards the door.*) I am going to let some air into the pub. I'll mop the dust. I'll open it up again. I know you won't like it, but we have to live. We were never paupers. It's not working.

He stops at the door.

STRAHINJA: And when she comes... I don't want her to find you mute!

He walks out. Jovanka's face is lighted with a smile. The end of Picture 5

Picture 6

Milica's house. Night. A kerosene lamps glimmers. Janko and Strahinja at the table. In front of them, a half empty brandy bottle. They are warmed up.

Strahinja: I mopped the dust and let the air in. It's shining. I have become old, but a pub never gets old.

JANKO: Holidays are coming up. It should be busy.

STRAHINJA: It will, it will. I am not worried. I am just not the same as I used to be. My arms and legs are not listening. I am old. (*Pause.*) Would you help? Would you be a co-owner? We would split everything in half.

Janko is thinking. He laughs heartily. Strahinja is quiet. Janko is thinking again.

JANKO: Are you serious?

STRAHINJA: I am serious.

JANKO: No, no. It's hard to stay whole here.

STRAHINJA: Chicken is smarter than a hen. Do you know how one lived from the pub?

JANKO: Everybody lived then. But one also had two pairs of oxen. Now one can hardly feed one. Pens were full of lambs. Two loins were roasted for Christmas. Different times have come and people are hungry. And every business is barren here.

Strahinja pours the brandy. They drink up.

STRAHINJA: What have you done in your life? I have to ask you. And when did you youths have time to do much work?

Janko is looking at him. He is a little offended. He is quiet.

JANKO: At a construction site, in a warehouse, in a sawmill, in a slaughterhouse. As a painter too. As a conductor for a while. I rubbed toilets too. I walked other people's dogs. And I cleaned their shit. I am not ashamed. Finally I decided to learn the blacksmith craft with a good master. And then I was a blacksmith. And I worked honestly. And I am naked. I am as naked as a gun. I am not running away from work but from poverty.

STRAHINJA: You think work is better there?

JANKO: For me it's the same. I don't know computers. Everybody's using them now. I am not a doctor. I am not schooled. I will either dig, or wash. But at least I'll know how much and for how much I am working.

Janko pours. They both drink up.

STRAHINJA: I am giving you an offer, you think about it.

JANKO: I already told you.

STRAHINJA: Think it over by yourself. Believe me. I know something too.

Milica Enters. She brings them a plate with cheese

and prosciutto. In the center – tomato. She puts it on the table. Strahinja winks to her skillfully, so that Janko wouldn't see.

MILICA: Eat, eat. You will burn out from the brandy, don't burn out!

Milica leaves. Janko and Strahinja continue drinking with the snack.

STRAHINJA: Your mother won't bear this.

JANKO: She lived through a lot. She will live through this too.

STRAHINJA: She has to do everything by herself. Around the house, around the garden, around the cattle. A man's arm is a man's arm.

JANKO: You are here, as you have been until now. Until I come back.

STRAHINJA: I can die now. Vanish. There's no one to pick her hay. The peasants won't do it. They won't because of Milutin.

Janko is quiet. He is thinking.

STRAHINJA (*Sharply.*): Why are you selling that very plot?

JANKO: I told you a hundred times why.

STRAHINJA: Have you offered anything else?

JANKO: Steep. Shady. And who builds a house on a slope?

STRAHINJA: Here, I'll give it you. I'll give you the first money I earn.

JANKO: I can't wait. I've already arranged everything. I don't have a choice. Understand that.

STRAHINJA: You are selling your father's grave. How can I understand?

JANKO: It's a piece of land. My land.

STRAHINJA: It's Milutin's grave!

JANKO: It's not Jesus's.

STRAHINJA: It's not Jesus's?

JANKO: It's not Jesus's.

STRAHINJA: Do you have shame?

JANKO: I do.

STRAHINJA: You have neither shame nor dignity.

JANKO: It's better to sell... Than to hang myself.

Silence. Unpleasant silence. Strahinja sobers up. As if a lightning has struck him. Janko would withdraw his word, but it's too late. Strahinja drinks up the brandy. He pours another one and drinks it up right away. He sighs deeply.

STRAHINJA: If it's come to the rope... Sell!

He is quiet. He was really struck by this. Janko would like to wiggle out. He can't.

STRAHINJA: Do you know that Ilija gambled? That he got into that crowd?

JANKO: I've heard.

STRAHINJA: He got indebted. He asked me to sell a part of the forest. I wouldn't hear about it. I thought he had to pay for his own mistakes. He paid with his life. He killed himself so they wouldn't kill him. I made a mistake. I didn't know. I should have known. I would sell everything now. Everything I have. (*Pause.*) If there were only an illness I could get. No. I am as healthy as an ox.

Janko tries to pour him brandy. Strahinja covers his shot glass with his hand.

STRAHINJA: I don't drink to forget. I drink to remember. It's nasty.

They are quiet for a long time. Janko taps him on the shoulder.

JANKO: When is Stamena coming back?

Everything is lively again. Strahinja is changed. As if nothing had happened.

STRAHINJA: My daughter is coming. My daughter. I will paint everything over. And plant flowers. Let it all be colorful. Let it all bloom in the spring. (*He remembers*): Hey, you! You could be my son-in-law.

Janko is embarrassed. He blushes.

JANKO: It was a long time ago.

STRAHINJA: Would you do it again?

JANKO: We were children then.

STRAHINJA: Think about it, Janko. Stamena is coming tomorrow. You are like a son to me. I am offering that to you too.

There are sounds of lightning coming from outside. Then a strong summer shower.

STRAHINJA: Is it possible, people? Rain. So we can breathe. And the earth to breathe. It's all cracked and dry. I have to go.

JANKO: Wait till it stops. It won't be long.

STRAHINJA: But I want to be rained on. I don't remember when was the last time.

Janko grabs him near the door.

JANKO: Milica will kill me. I can't let you go.

STRAHINJA: I want to be rained on. I want to be all wet.

Strahinja walks out. Thunder. Lightning. Shower. Janko approaches the table and pours the brandy.

The end of Picture 6

Picture 7

Strahinja's house. Jovanka sits at her place knitting. Strahinja walks in.

STRAHINJA: Don't give the cattle more than it can eat! It doesn't know what its measure is. There, it's tossing and turning in the stable. I am telling you for the hundredth time: Don't give it to them!

He is washing his face. Jovanka is knitting and not watching him.

STRAHINJA: I picked up all the weed. It was over the head. I cut my hands all over. I cleaned the path too. From the gate to the threshold. Our house looks like a house now. It's over. I want the child to be happy when she comes back. *(Pause)*. And you have to find

a way to start talking. When you lie in the grave no one will make you talk. And here, under this roof, you have to sing. As a nightingale, Jovanka.

He takes a knife and an apple. He takes out the wool from her hands. He shoves the apple and the knife into her hands.

STRAHINJA: Theeere! Peel the apple. Leave that thing for once.

The end of Picture 7

Picture 8

Milica's house. Janko is sitting at the table and counting money.

JANKO: Ten thousand even. A third is yours.

He is counting a third.

MILICA: I can do without it.

JANKO: Have it just in case.

He approaches her and gives her the money.

JANKO: Take it when I tell you.

Milica takes the money and tosses it into air.

MILICA: I don't need your money.

Janko bends over and picks up the money from the floor.

MILICA: If you want to, leave it to Strahinja. To pay for the funeral when I die.

JANKO: You have already died about a hundred times.

MILICA: I will really die the hundredth and first time.

JANKO: I will find you the same as you are now.

MILICA: You will never come back, son. The foreign world will make you drunk. Your mother knows you.

JANKO: Oh, you are starting again.

MILICA: In these two years, you could have at least come for the family feast.

JANKO: I was working.

MILICA: You've changed.

JANKO: I only grew up.

He comes up to her and strokes her hair.

MILICA: I need your comfort.

Milica pushes him away. They are quiet.

MILICA: I am afraid. I am afraid of myself. Strahinja doesn't come for seven days sometimes. No one comes over. I forget to speak. At night I dream I have died. I wake up, and I don't know did I or not. There is no one to tell me. I talk to myself. Sometimes with Milutin. I think I am crazy. Alone and crazy is the same.

JANKO: Here, I will write to you every day. Every day, I promise.

He hugs her emphatically. Milica breaks away from the hug even more emphatically.

MILICA: Leave me! That's what he did. First steps on me, then kisses me.

JANKO: We are not the same type.

MILICA: You think? Well, your hands are the same. The fingers. You have the same face. You've become the image you are running away from.

JANKO: You are lying! You are offending me and lying! You are lying!

MILICA: I know how much you hate him.

JANKO: I hate him! I hate him!

Strahinja burst in. He is panting. He is gasping for air. And words.

STRAHINJA: They pulled out the cross... Pulled out the cross...

MILICA: What are you talking about?!

STRAHINJA: There's no grave... Where the grave was... It's gone... They flattened it. The cross is leaning on the fence.

MILICA: What cross? Which cross?

Strahinja walks out and brings a wooden cross. Janko is upset. Milica is looking at the cross.

STRAHINJA: I am not crazy.

JANKO: We'll stick it into our part.

MILICA: What our part?

JANKO: We'll stick it a meter lower. Instead of above his head it will be above his feet. *That's where he was buried, next to the edge. I couldn't have divided it differently.*

MILICA: You are not speaking from your head.

JANKO: No one will notice. The earth has eaten him up anyway.

MILICA: Eaten up, eaten up.

STRAHINJA: The peasants have gathered on top. They are laughing and pushing each other.

MILICA: That was not our deal, Janko. It can't be done, son. It would be too much.

Milica takes the cross and starts walking toward the door. Strahinja goes after her. Janko stands in front of them.

JANKO: I won't let you!

STRAHINJA: What are you doing, you hot head?!

MILICA: Get out of the way! Get out, I will kill you with this cross.

Janko takes a paper out of his pocket and shows it to Milica.

JANKO: This is the contract. This is my signature. You can't go against the court.

Milica puts the cross down and sits on the chair.

MILICA: You'll do the same to mine.

STRAHINJA: Don't expect anything better.

MILICA: Your are exacting a revenge. On me. Why? Why, you ass?

She is jumping. Furious. She is hitting her chest.

MILICA: Here! Kill! Here! Here you go! Kill! Kill us all! *Strahinja is holding her. Trying to calm her down.*

MILICA (To Janko): Who are you? I don't know you. You are not my son. He is not like that. You are a devil, Satan. Satan! Everything will come back to you. Your children would get it back to you.

STRAHINJA (*Reproachfully*): Don't curse!
He holds her mouth. Milica is quiet. Janko is putting up with it.

JANKO: Everyone is leaving. They can't stay here. Even the air is suffocating me here. I am afraid of the life here. (*Milica starts crying.*) I want to live. I am alive! I am alive! Do you hear me? (*To Milica*) Don't cry. Don't cry. I can't watch your tears. Please, don't cry.

STRAHINJA: Don't cry, when the child tells you.

MILICA: Go, son. Go and don't come back. Run away!
Janko runs out.

MILICA: Do you see what my son is like?

STRAHINJA: I see. I see everything.

MILICA: This is not true. This is a bad dream.

The end of Picture 8

Picture 9

Strahinja's house. Jovanka is sitting in her chair. Her eyes are closed. It looks like she is sleeping. She is completely still. An inner struggle starts showing on her face. Undefined sounds start coming from outside. Like someone is coming. Jovanka jumps. She walks towards the door. She stops. She is straightening her hair. She is nervous. The sound is getting closer. It is already clear someone is coming. Jovanka stands by the door. She is holding the doorknob. Someone stops in front of the door. She is still. Her eyes are closed. She suddenly opens up the door. A cry breaks from her chest.

JOVANKA: My child!

She stands motionless for a few moments. Strahinja walks in.

STRAHINJA: She is here. She is looking around the yard. Sit.

Strahinja sits down. Jovanka sits next to him. They

are looking at one another. She is looking for something in his face. He is hiding his look. He is uncomfortable.

STRAHINJA: It will be any second now.

Jovanka grabs Strahinja by the arm. Strahinja tries not to start crying.

STRAHINJA: No, I can't... I am lying... I can't do it anymore. She is in the yard. She is waiting for us to go out. She doesn't want to see you.

Strahinja gets up. He takes Jovanka by the arm. They walk out. After a few moments, Stamenka triumphantly walks in. She is carrying two bags. She puts them down.

The end of Picture 9

Picture 10

Strahinja's house. Stamenka sits comfortably. Her legs are stretched out on a chair. She is smoking and making large smoke rings. Janko walks in. He sees her and freezes. She looks at him. She is laughing. The laughter turns into a cackle.

STAMENKA: Excuse me... Excuse me... You are really funny. Look at yourself.

JANKO: I am leaving tomorrow. I came to see you.

STAMENKA: You do have something to see.

He is still „staring“ at her. She stops laughing. She offers him a cigarette.

STAMENKA: You want to light one? Yes, you smoke for sure. Why are you looking at me like that.

JANKO: So... I haven't seen you in a long time.

STAMENKA: And, do you like my hairdo?

JANKO: It's pretty.

STAMENKA: I don't believe you. No one from the village can like this kind of hair. You are from the village. That means you don't like it.

JANKO: You are from the village too.

STAMENA: But I am a hairdresser. This color is most fashionable now.

JANKO: I don't know much about fashion.

STAMENA: So, you are leaving. I've heard. Smart. And I heard what you sold. Bravo. *That's the smartest thing I've heard. Is it stuffy in here?*

JANKO: No.

STAMENA: I always feel some sort of stench. I am disgusted by this stuffy air.

She opens up the window. She takes out a bottle of brandy. Pours. She puts it back.

JANKO: Stamena! You shouldn't...

STAMENA: Don't call me by that name. I hate that name. That's how my grandmother was called. Disgusting. And I am not stout (*Stamena*). You see what I am like.

JANKO: You shouldn't drink.

STAMENA: Why?

JANKO: You know best.

STAMENA: I am depressed. I have to drink. You would drink too if you had lost a brother.

They are quiet. Janko doesn't know what to say. He is trying to change the subject.

JANKO: And do you remember...

STAMENA: What?

She remembers. She starts laughing. They are laughing together.

STAMENA: I taught you how to kiss, you snotty boy. How you were biting. You almost bit off my lips. We would disappear, and we wouldn't come back all day long.

JANKO: They would look for us for hours. It was the best period of my life. Those images often appear before my eyes. I remember everything to the last detail.

STAMENA: Only one image appears to me. The image

of my brother hanging. Everything has been different since.

JANKO: I am sorry.

STAMENA: They are guilty for everything. I can't look at them. Strahinja is guilty. And she is guilty for keeping quiet.

JANKO: Don't say that.

STAMENA: I won't, I won't. I have a cure for them. *She lights a cigarette. She puts her hand on her stomach.*

STAMENA: I am carrying it here. Fourth month. I found out about it in the hospital by accident.

JANKO: Who is the father?

STAMENA: I don't know. In fact, I think I know. It doesn't matter. I won't have it anyway.

JANKO: Why?

STAMENA: Do I look like someone who is capable of taking care of a child?

JANKO: Give it to them. They would...

STAMENA: I won't, I won't have it for them. I don't want it to grow up with them.

JANKO: You would love it, I know.

STAMENA: I don't love anyone. Not even myself. Nor them. Nor life. I don't like anyone nor anyone. I don't feel anything.

JANKO: You are lying.

STAMENA: Why do you think I am lying?

JANKO: Because I know. I know what I would give for that child in your belly.

STAMENA: What would you give?

JANKO: Everything.

STAMENA: Do you want me to sell it to you?

JANKO: Don't fool around.

STAMENA: Do you want me to sell it to you?

JANKO: I do.

STAMENA: What would you do with it? You are still a child.

JANKO: I would buy it for my mother.

STAMENA: What a fool you are.

Janko starts giggling. Stamena is looking at him. Janko is cracking from laughter.

JANKO: I, a fool? You are a fool. I would give my life for the thing you want to throw away. I will never have children.

Silence. They are quiet for a long time.

STAMENA: What are you making up again?

JANKO: A doctor told me.

STAMENA: They know everything. Like they were the smartest.

JANKO: She couldn't conceive for a long time. I took her to the hospital. They checked her up. Then they checked me. The fault is mine. Mine. The doctor asked me if I had some injuries. I told him I didn't, except that my father hit me two or three times, I don't remember, where even a dog is never hit...

STAMENA (*Impatiently*): So is that what it's from?

JANKO: He didn't tell me. He only asked me if my father were alive. I told him he wasn't. And he didn't say anything to that.

STAMENA: And you are now, in fact, going to get the cure?

JANKO: There is no cure.

STAMENA: In fact, you took a revenge on him now.

JANKO: I only need the money. For the trip and for the start, while I get around.

STAMENA: Your girl is coming with you?

JANKO: She isn't.

STAMENA: She is not going?

JANKO: While I went to get the booklets, she disappeared. I never saw her again.

STAMENA (*Foolishly*): Why didn't you look for her? You are a guy.

JANKO (*Laughing*): I lied and lied to my mother. I wrote her letters. Made up things...

STAMENA: I can't believe what a fool you are. Why should I be interested in that, anyway.

They are quiet for a long time.

JANKO: I heard they have naked women in windows there. A friend wrote to me about it. I can't wait to see them.

STAMENA: Why are you going anyway?

JANKO: And why should I stay?

STAMENA: You are right.

JANKO: As that friend of mine would say, I don't want to piss in an outhouse anymore.

They both laugh.

JANKO: And what are you planning? Are you staying?

STAMENA: I have no idea. I might stay. It's the same for me everywhere. Bad. The only thing I know is that I won't have the child for them.

JANKO: You'll be sorry. Believe me.

STAMENA: That's what I've decided. And that's how it'll be.

JANKO: OK then. I am leaving.

STAMENA: Bye.

Janko is standing for a few moments.

JANKO: We haven't seen one another in a long time.

Stamena turns around. Janko leaves without saying goodbye. She makes large smoke rings.

The end of Picture 10

Picture 11

Milica's house. Milica is walking from one window to the other. She is looking outside. There are two suitcases in the middle of the room. Janko walks in.

MILICA: Where have you been? I was afraid. Strahinja is waiting for you with a carriage near the road. He can't come down. He is afraid the cart would get stuck. It's muddy.

JANKO: I had to walk through the village one more time. I haven't met anyone on the way. Not even a dog. Only wind.

They are quiet. Looking at one another. They embrace forcefully.

MILICA: I won't see you off with tears. I've decided.
They embrace even more forcefully.

MILICA: I am only asking you for one thing. On the day of the family feast, go to the nearest church and light a candle. Then think about your mother. I am not asking for much.

Janko is looking at her. They are hiding tears.

JANKO: Take care.

MILICA: You take care! I don't have to take care of anything. And when you go through a hard time – cry. Don't hold it. That's the worst. Go now. Strahinja is waiting for you.

JANKO: Let him wait!

They embrace most forcefully. Janko kisses her.

MILICA: A nicer world awaits you. Better than this one. You don't have to be sorry for anything. Go now. Go when I am telling you. Strahinja is waiting for you.

JANKO: Farewell.

He picks up the suitcases. He leaves.

MILICA: Above, when you pass next to Milutin's grave, don't turn around. I have to. You don't. He wouldn't turn around for you either.

Janko runs out. Milica stay by herself. Forever.

The end of Picture 11

Picture 12

Strahinja's house. Dawn. Mooing of a cow is heard in the distance. Strahinja walks in carrying a bundle of hay. He places the hay on the table. He has a bell around his neck.

STRAHINJA: All the youth is gone to the city and ruined. There is a force drawing them, like a magnet. I am too stupid to understand that. When something presses me here, I run to the stable, and hit Ružica over her back and ribs with a belt, till she starts slobbering. And that cow feeds me. And I hate her for feeding me. And she gave birth to two calves yesterday. She is only looking at them and licking them. I felt like licking them too. Mooing too. And I mooed. Moooo... moooo... She mooed too. I was overcome by a pleasant feeling. (*Mooing is heard in the distance.*) It looks like she is forgiving me. And it's a cow! And I ate hay with her. And hay is tastier than people's food. (*He eats hay.*) (*He yells.*) You sleep, just sleep. And I will moo. I've decided. You don't get anything from complaining. I swear to myself I will live till I get bored. Out of spite. I will live for a thousand years. Till they kill me. Mooo... mooo...

A cow is heard in the distance.

The end of Picture 12

Picture 13

Milica's house. Ten years have passed. Deep winter. The interior gives an impression of dilapidation. There is spider web in the corners. Milica sits in bed wrapped up in a blanket. Her hair is completely grey now. She gets up and slowly walks to the window. She looks outside. She comes back to the stove and throws in the last piece wood. The fire is crackling. She walks to the window.

MILICA: You've decided to block me with snow. (*Yelling.*) Damned kids! Sled on your own! You've broken the fence, you little rascals. There's a lot of them. I can't count them. They are multiplying all the time. Another one every year. And they are all naughty. (*She*

bangs the window with her hand.) Me crazy! Me crazy! That's how you talk about me.

She comes back and sits at the table.

MILICA: There. Do you hear? My bones are breaking. You are imagining things, Milutin. I am not crazy. *(She laughs.)* I am fooled by their children, and you are pressed by their foundation. *(She suddenly jumps, yells.)* Who are you threatening? I am not afraid. Yell, yell. I don't hear you, you madman. *(Pause.)* Do you know how well I am doing since you're gone? You were really unbearable. I would beat you up now. I would hit you on the head like an ox. Everybody started breathing since you are gone. The cattle and the poultry rejoiced. I don't feel sorry for you. Why would I feel sorry for you? I feel sorry for myself! Myself and my Strahinja. He would have lived with me a little longer. *(Pause)* Their stove burned during the night. All three of them suffocated. The police was there. It was in the papers. An accident. Although, they say, it looked like the daughter. No one will ever know. It was a long time ago.

Knocking is heard at the door.

MILICA: Knock, knock, you little rascal.

The knocking is heard again. Milica gets up and walks to the door. She opens it. A powerful thunder sound is heard. A snowflake or two falls in. She closes the door.

MILICA: Always like this. I open it for him, and he runs away. Coward.

Knocking is heard again. Milica goes and takes a stick from underneath the couch. She approaches the door. Opens it up. She waves with the stick.

MILICA: Show yourself, you coward! Leave me alone. *She comes back and sits on the couch. She wraps herself in a blanket.*

MILICA: Do you remember, Milutin, how you burned yourself from the brandy? I should have let you die then. I was putting cold cloth on your forehead. What a fool. *(Pause.)* I am terribly cold. I want to sleep now. Leave me, Milutin. *(She gets up.)* I will turn on the light. If Janko comes by, so he wouldn't wade in the dark. *She walks to the door. She turns on the light outside. Now it is clearer that snow is falling hard. Milica is looking outside.*

MILICA: If I sat on that moon, would I see him from there? Ten years and more he hasn't sent a word. He doesn't have to. Just let him stay healthy. I will endure.

She comes back and wraps herself in the blanket. Knocking is heard again. Milica gets up and slowly, on her tiptoes, sneaks towards the door. She opens it suddenly. She stands for a few moments. She slams it. She returns and lies on the bed. Knocking is heard again. Milica covers her head with the blanket. The knocking becomes louder.

The end of Picture 13

THE END